

THE QUESTION OF FEAR AND THE ANSWER OF FAITH

NO. 108

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 AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

“Will He plead against me with His great power? No but He would put strength in me.”
Job 23:6.

I SHALL not tonight consider the connection of these words, or what was particularly intended by Job. I shall use them in, perhaps, another sense from that which he intended. No doubt Job meant to say that if God would allow him to argue his case before Him, it was his firm belief that God, so far from taking advantage of His superior strength in the controversy, would even strengthen him, that the controversy might be fair and that the judgment might be unbiased. “He would not plead against me with His great strength. No but He would put strength in me.” We shall use the text, however, tonight, in another sense.

It is one of the sure marks of a lost and ruined state when we are careless and indifferent concerning God. One of the peculiar marks of those who are dead in sin is this—they are the wicked who forget God. God is not in all their thoughts. “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.” The sinful man is ever anxious to keep out of his mind the very thought of the Being, the existence, or the Character of God. And so long as man is unregenerate there will be nothing more abhorrent to his taste, or his feelings than anything which deals with the Divine Being.

God perhaps, as Creator, he may consider. But the God of the Bible, the infinite Jehovah, judging righteously among the sons of men—condemning and acquitting—that God he has no taste for. He is not in all his thoughts, nor does he regard Him. And mark you, it is a blessed sign of the work of grace in the heart when man begins to consider God. *He* is not far from God’s heart who has meditations of God in his own heart. If we desire to seek after God, to know Him, to understand Him and to be at peace with Him, it is a sign that God has dealings with our soul, for otherwise we should still have hated His name and abhorred His character.

There are two things in my text, both of which have relation to the Divine Being. The first is, *the question of fear*—“Will He plead against me with His great power?” And the second is, *the answer of faith*—“No but He will put strength in me.” The fearful and the prayerful, who are afraid of sin and fear God, together with those who are faithful and believe in God are in a hopeful state. And hence, both the question of the one and the answer of the other have reference to the great Jehovah, our God, who is forever to be adored.

I. We shall consider, in the first place, tonight THE INQUIRY OF FEAR. “Will He plead against me with His great power?” I shall consider this as a question asked by the convicted sinner. He is seeking salvation but when he is bid to come before his God and find mercy, he is compelled by his intense anxiety to make the trembling inquiry, “Will He plead against me with His great power?”

1. And, first, I gather from this question the fact that *a truly penitent man has a right idea of many of God’s attributes.* He does not understand them all, for instance he does not yet know God’s great mercy. He does not yet understand His unbounded compassion. But so far as his knowledge of God extends, he has an extremely great view of Him. To him the everlasting Jehovah appears great in every attribute and action and supremely great in His Majesty.

The poor *worldling* knows there is a God. But He is to him a little God. As for the Justice of God, the mere worldly man scarcely ever thinks of it. He considers that there is a God but he regards Him as a Being who has little enough respect for justice. Not so, however, the sinner. When God has once convicted him of his sin, he sees God as a *great* God, a God of *great* justice and of *great* power. Whoever may misunderstand God’s great justice or God’s great power, a convicted sinner never will.

Ask him what he thinks of God’s Justice and he will tell you it is like the great mountains. It is high, he cannot attain unto it. “Ah,” says he, “God’s Justice is very mighty. It *must* smite me. He must hurl an avalanche of woe upon my devoted head. Justice demands that He should punish me. I am so great a sinner that I cannot suppose He would ever pass

by my transgression, my iniquity and my sin.” It is all in vain for you to tell such a man that God is little in His Justice. He replies, “No,” most solemnly “No.” And you can most plainly read his earnestness in his visage, when he replies, “No.”

He replies, “I feel that God is Just. I am even now consumed by His anger. By His wrath am I troubled.” “Tell me God is not Just?” says he. “I know He is. I feel that within an hour or two Hell must swallow me up unless Divine mercy delivers me. Unless Christ shall wash me in His blood, I feel I can never hope to stand among the ransomed.” He has not that strange idea of God’s Justice that some of you have. You think sin is a trifle. You suppose that one brief prayer will wipe it all away. You dream that by attendance at your churches and at your chapels you will wash away your sins.

You suppose that God, for some reason or other, will very easily forgive your sin. But you have no right idea of God’s Justice. You have not learned that God never does forgive until He has first punished and that if He does forgive anyone, it is because He has punished Christ first in the place of that person. But he never forgives without first exacting the punishment. That would be an infringement on His Justice. And shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? You have, many of you, lax enough ideas of the Justice of the Divine Being. But not so the sinner who is laboring under a knowledge of sin.

An awakened soul feels that God is greatly *powerful*. Tell him that God is but a weak God and he will answer you—and shall I tell you what illustrations he will give you to prove that God is great in power? He will say, “Oh, Sir, God is great in power as well in Justice. Look up yonder—can you not see in the dark past, when rebel angels sinned against God, they were so mighty that each one of them might have devastated Eden and shaken the earth? But God, with ease, hurled Satan and the rebel angels out of Heaven and drove them down to Hell.”

“Sir,” says the sinner, “is He not mighty?” And then he will go on to tell you how God unbound the swaddling bands of the great ocean that it might leap upon the earth. And how he bade it swallow up the whole of mortal race, save those who were hidden in the ark. And the sinner says, with his eyes well near starting from their sockets—“Sir, does not this prove that He is great in power and will by no means acquit the wicked?” And then he proceeds, “Look again at the Red Sea. Mark how Pharaoh was enticed into its depths and how the parted sea, that stood aloof for awhile to give the Israelites an easy passage, embraced with eager joy, locked the adverse host within their arms and swallowed them up quick.”

And as he thinks he sees the Red Sea rolling over the slain, he exclaims, “Sir, God is great in power. I feel He must be, when I think of what He has done.” And as if he had not finished his oration and would let us know the whole of the greatness of God’s power, he continues his narration of the deeds of vengeance. “O Sir, remember, He must be great in power, for I know that He has dug a Hell which is deep and large, without bottom. He has made a Tophet—the pile thereof is fire and much wood and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, shall kindle it.”

“Yes, beyond a doubt,” groans the trembling soul, “He must be great in power. I feel He is and I feel more than that. I feel that Justice has provoked God’s arm of power to smite me and unless I am covered in that righteousness of Christ, I shall before long be dashed to pieces and utterly devoured by the fury of His wrath.” The sinner, as far as the harsher attributes of God’s nature are concerned, when he is under conviction, has a very fair and a just idea of the Divine Being.

Though, as I have remarked before, he does not yet understand the mercy and the infinite compassion of God towards His Covenant people. He has too harsh a view of God, dwelling only upon the darker side and not upon those attributes which shed a more cheering light upon the darkness of our misery. That is the first Truth which I glean from the text.

2. The second Truth which I gather from this question, “Will He plead against me with His great power?” is this that *the trembling sinner feels that every attribute of God is against him as a sinner*. “Oh,” he will say, “I look to God and I can see nothing in Him but a consuming fire. I look to His Justice and I see it, with sword unsheathed, ready to smite me low. I look to His power and I behold it, like a mighty mountain, tottering to its fall, to crush me. I look to His immutability and methinks I see stern Justice written on its brow and I hear it cry, “Sinner, I will not save, I will condemn you.”

“I look to his *faithfulness* and I mark that all His threats are as much ‘yes and amen’ as His promises. I look to His love but even His love frowns and accuses me, saying, ‘you have slighted Me.’ I look to His mercy but even His mercy launches out the thunderbolt, with accusing voice, reminding me of my former hardness of heart and harshly chiding me thus, ‘Go you to Justice and glean what you can there. I, even I, am against you, for you have made Me wroth!’ ”

Oh, trembling Penitent, where are you tonight? Somewhere here, I know you are. Would to God there were many like you! I know you will agree with me in this statement, for you have a dread apprehension that every Attribute of the Divine Being's Character is armed with fire and sword to destroy you. You see all His attributes like heavy pieces of ordnance, all pointed at you and ready to be discharged. Oh that you may find a refuge in Christ! And oh, you who never were convicted of sin, let me for one moment lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet.

Know this—perhaps you laugh at it—that all God's Attributes are against you if you are not in Christ! If you are not sheltered beneath the wings of Jesus there is not one single glorious name of God, nor one celestial Attribute, which does not curse you. What would you think, if at your door tonight there should be planted great pieces of heavy cannon, all loaded, to be discharged against you? But do you know that where you sit tonight there are worse than heavy cannons to be discharged at you? Yes, I see them, I see them! There is God's Justice and there is the angel of vengeance, standing with the match, ready to bid it hurl vengeance at you.

There is His Power. There is His bare arm, ready to break your bones and crush you into powder. There is His Love, all blazing, turned to Hate because you rejected it. And there is His Mercy, clad with mail, going forth like a warrior to overthrow you. What say you, O Sinner, tonight? Against *you* all of God's Attributes are pointed. He has bent His bow and made it ready. The sword of the Lord has been bathed in Heaven. It is bright and sharp, it is furbished. How will you escape when a mighty arm shall bring it down upon you? Or how will you flee when He shall draw His bow and shoot his arrows at you and make you a mark for all the arrows of His vengeance?

BEWARE, BEWARE, you that forget God, lest He tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver! For tear you in pieces He will—unless you shelter in the Rock of Ages and wash yourselves in the stream of His wondrous blood. Fly to Him, then, you chief of sinners, fly! But if you will not, know this—God is against you! He will plead against you with His great power unless you have our all glorious Jesus to be your advocate.

3. And just one more hint here. The sinner, when he is laboring on account of guilt, feels that God would be Just if He were to “plead against him with His great power.” “Oh,” says he, “If I go to God in prayer, perhaps instead of hearing me He will crush me as I would a moth.” What, Soul, would He be Just if He did that? “Yes,” says the sinner, “Just, supremely Just. Perhaps I shall have stripped myself of all my ornaments and like a naked one have flown to Him. Perhaps then He will lash me harder than before and I shall feel it all the worse for this my nakedness.” And will He be Just, should the flagellation of His vengeance fall upon your shoulders? “Yes,” he says, “infallibly Just.”

And should He smite you to the lowest Hell, would He be Just? “Yes,” says the penitent, “Just, infinitely Just. I should have no word to say against Him. I should feel that I deserved it all. My only question is not whether He would be Just to do it but *will He do it?*” “Will He plead against me with His great power?” This is the question of fear. Some here, perhaps, are asking that question—now let them hear the reply of faith. God give them a good deliverance!

II. THE REPLY OF FAITH IS, “No.” O sinner, hear that word, “No.” There are sonnets condensed into it. “Will He plead against me with His great power?” “No, NO,” say the saints in Heaven. “NO,” say the faithful on earth. “NO,” say the promises. “NO,” unanimously exclaim the oracles of Scripture. NO, most emphatically NO. He will *not* plead against you with His great power but He will put strength into you.

1. And here we make a similar remark to that with which we commenced the former part of the sermon, namely, this—*the fearful soul has a very right view of God in many respects but the faithful soul has a right view of God in all respects.* He that has faith in God knows more of God than he who only fears Him. He who believes God understands God better than any man. Why, if I believe God, I can see all His Attributes vindicated. I can see the “wrath of justice expiated by yonder bleeding Sufferer on the accursed tree. I can see His Mercy and His Justice joining hands with His Wrath.

I can see His power now turned on my behalf and no longer against me. I can see His Faithfulness become the guardian of my soul instead of the slaughterer of my hopes. I can see all His Attributes standing, each of them conjoined, each of them glorious, each of them lovely and all united in the work of man's salvation. He that *fears* God knows only half of God. He that *believes* God, knows *all* of God that He can know. And the more he believes God, the more he understands God, the more he comprehends His Glory, His Character, His Mature and His Attributes.

2. The next thing is that *the Believer, when he is brought into peace with God does not tremble at the thought of God's power.* He does not ask, “Will He plead against me with His great power?” But he says, “No, that very power, once my terror and fear, is now my refuge and my hope, for He shall put that very power in me. I rejoice that God is Almighty, for

He will lend me His omnipotence—‘He will put strength into me.’ ” Now, here is a great thought! If I had power to handle it, it would give me opportunity indeed to preach to you. But I cannot reach the heights of eloquence, I shall therefore simply exhibit the thought for a moment to you.

The very power which would have damned my soul, saves my soul. The very power that would have crushed me, God puts into me that the work of salvation may be accomplished. No, He will not use it to crush me but He will put that very strength *into* me. Do see there the Mighty One upon His Throne? Dread Sovereign, I see Your awful arm. What? Will You crush the sinner? Will You utterly destroy him with Your strength? “No,” says He, “Come here, Child.”

And if you go to His Almighty Throne, “There,” says He “that same arm which made you quake, see there, I give it to you. Go out and live. I have made you mighty as I am, to do My works. I will put strength into you. The same strength which would have broken you to pieces on the wheel shall now be put into you, that you may do mighty works.”

Now, I will show you how this great strength displays itself. Sometimes it goes out in prayer. Did you ever hear a man pray in whom God had put strength? You have heard some of us poor puny souls pray, I dare say. But have you ever heard a man pray that God had made into a giant? Oh, if you have, you will say it is a mighty thing to hear such a man in supplication. I have seen him as if he had seized the angel and would pull him down. I have seen him now and then slip in his wrestling. But, like a giant, he has recovered his footing and seemed like Jacob, to hurl the angel to the ground.

I have marked the man lay hold upon the Throne of mercy and declare, “Lord, I will never let go, except You bless me.” I have seen him, when Heaven’s gates have been apparently barred, go up to them and say, “You gates, open wide in Jesus’ name.” And I have seen the gates fly open before him, as if the man were God Himself. For he is armed with God Almighty’s strength. I have seen that man, in prayer, discover some great mountain in his way. And he prayed it down, until it became a very molehill. He has beaten the hills and made them like chaff, by the immensity of his might.

Some of you think I am talking enthusiasm. But such cases have been and are now. Oh, to have heard Luther pray! Luther, you know, when Melancthon was dying, went to his deathbed and said, “Melancthon, you shall not die!” “Oh,” said Melancthon, “I must die! It is a world of toil and trouble.” “Melancthon,” said he, “I have need of you and God’s cause has need of you and as my name is Luther, you shall not die!” The physician said he would. Well, down went Luther on his knees and began to tug at Death. Old Death struggled mightily for Melancthon and he had got him well near on his shoulders.

“Drop him,” said Luther, “drop him, I want him.” “He,” said death, “he is my prey, I will take him!” “Down with him,” said Luther, “down with him, Death, or I will wrestle with you!” And he seemed to take hold of the grim monster and hurl him to the ground. And he came off victorious, like an Orpheus, with his wife, up from the very shades of death. He had delivered Melancthon from death by prayer! “Oh,” say you, “that is an extraordinary case.” No, Beloved, not one-half so extraordinary as you dream. I have men and women here who have done the same in other cases.

They have asked a thing of God and have had it. That have been to the Throne and showed a promise and said they would not come away without its fulfillment and have come back from God’s Throne conquerors of the Almighty. For prayer moves the arm that moves the world. “Prayer is the sinew of God,” said one, “it moves His arm.” And so it is. Verily, in prayer, with the strength of the faithful heart, there is a beautiful fulfillment of the text, “He will put strength in me.”

A second illustration. Not only in prayer but in *duty*. The man who has great faith in God and whom God has girded with strength, how gigantic does he become? Have you ever read of those great heroes who put to flight whole armies and scattered kings like the snow on Salmon? Have you ever read of those men that were fearless of foes and stalked onward before all their opposers as if they would as soon die as live? I read, this day, of a case in the old Church of Scotland, before that King James who wished to force the black prelacy upon them. Andrew Melville and some of his associates were deputed to wait upon the king and as they were going with a scroll ready written, they were warned to take care and return, for their lives were at stake.

They paused a moment and Andrew said, “I am not afraid, thank God, nor feeble-spirited in the cause and message of Christ. Come what pleases God to send, our commission shall be executed.” At these words the deputation took courage and went forward. On reaching the palace and having obtained an audience, they found his majesty attended by Lennox and Arran and several other lords, all of whom were English. They presented their remonstrance. Arran lifted it

from the table and glancing over it, he then turned to the ministers and furiously demanded, “Who dares sign these treasonable articles?”

“WE Dare.” said Andrew Melville, “and will render our lives in the cause.” Having thus spoken, he came forward to the table, took the pen, subscribed his name and was followed by his Brethren. Arran and Lennox were confounded. The king looked on in silence and the nobles in surprise. Thus did our good forefathers appear before kings and yet were not ashamed. “The proud had them greatly in derision, yet they declined not from the Law of God.” Having thus discharged their duty, after a brief conference, the ministers were permitted to depart in peace.

The king trembled more at them than if a whole army had been at his gates. And why was this? It was because God had put His own strength into them, to make them masters of their duty. And you have some such in your midst now. Despised they may be. But God has made them like the lion-like men of David who would go down into the pit in the depth of winter and take the lion by the throat and slay him. We have some in our Churches—but a remnant, I admit—who are not afraid to serve their God, like Abdiel, “faithful among the faithless found.”

We have some who are superior to the customs of the age and scorn to bow at mammon’s knee—who will not use the trimming language of too many modern ministers but stand out for God’s Gospel and the pure white banner of Christ—unstained and unsullied by the doctrines of men. Then are they mighty! *Why* they are mighty is because God has put strength in them.

Still, some say, I have dealt with extraordinary cases. Come then, now we will have a home-case, one of your own sort that will be like yourselves. Did you ever stand and take a view of Heaven? Have you discerned the hills which lie between your soul and Paradise? Have you counted the lions you have to fight, the giants to be slain and the rivers to be crossed? Did you ever notice the many temptations with which you must be beset, the trials you have to endure, the difficulties you have to overcome, the dangers you have to avoid? Did you ever take a bird’s-eye view of Heaven and all the dangers which are strewn thickly along the path there? And did you ever ask yourself this question, “How shall I, a poor feeble worm, ever get there?”

Did you ever say within yourself, “I am not a match for all my foes, how shall I arrive at Paradise?” If you have ever asked this question, I will tell you what is the only answer for it—you must be girded with Almighty strength or else you will never gain the victory. Easy your path may be but it is too hard for your infantile strength without Almighty power. Your path may be one of little temptation and of shallow trial. But you will be drowned in the floods yet, unless Almighty power preserves you. Mark me! However smooth your way, there is nothing short of the bare arm of Deity that can land anyone of you in Heaven. We must have Divine strength, or else we shall never get there. And there is an illustration of these words—“No, but He will put His strength in me.”

“And shall I hold on to the end?” says the Believer. Yes, you will, for God’s strength is in you. “Shall I be able to bear such-and-such a trial?” Yes, you will. Cannot Omnipotence stem the torrent? And Omnipotence is in you. For, like Ignatius of old you are a God-bearer. You bear God about with you. Your heart is a temple of the Holy Spirit and you shall yet overcome. “But can I ever stand firm in such-and-such an evil day?” Oh, yes you will, for He will put His strength in you.

I was in company, some time ago, with some ministers. One of them observed, “Brother, if there were to be stakes in Smithfield again, I am afraid they would find very few to burn among us.” “Well,” I said, “I do not know anything about how you would burn. But this I know right well, that there always will be those who are ready to die for Christ.” “Oh,” said he, “but they are not the right sort of men.” “Well,” said I, “but do you think they are the Lord’s children?” “Yes, I believe they are but they are not the right sort.” “Ah!” said I, “but you would find them the right sort if they came to the test, every one of them. They have not got burning grace yet. What would be the use of it?”

We do not want the grace till the stakes come. But we should have burning grace in burning moments. If now, tonight, a hundred of us were called to die for Christ, I believe there would not only be found a hundred but five hundred, that would march to death and sing all the way. Whenever I find faith, I believe that God will put strength into the man. And I never think anything to be impossible to a man with faith in God, while it is written, “He will put strength in me.”

3. But now the last observation shall be, we shall all want this at the last—and it is a mercy for us that this is written, for never shall we require it, perhaps, more than then. *O Believer, do you think you will be able to swim the Jordan with your own strength?* Caesar could not swim the Tiber, equipped as he was. And do you hope to swim the Jordan with

your flesh about you? No, you will sink. Unless Jesus—as Aeneas did Anchises, from the flames of Rome, upon his shoulders—lifts you from Jordan and carries you across the stream—you will never be able to walk across the river.

You will never be able to face that tyrant and smile in his face unless you have something more than mortal. You will need then to be belted about with the girdle of divinity, or else your loins will be loosed and your strength will fail you, when you need it most. Many a man has ventured to the Jordan in his own strength. But oh, how he has shrieked and howled, when the first wave has touched his feet! But never weakling went to death with God within him but he found himself mightier than the grave. Go on, Christian, for this is your promise. “He will put strength in me”—

*Weak, though I am, yet through His might,
I all things can perform.”*

Go on! Dread not God’s power but rejoice at this, He will put His strength in you. He will not use His power to crush you.

Just one word and then farewell. There is within reach of my voice, I am thoroughly convinced, one who is seeking Christ, whose only fear is this—“Sir, I would but I cannot pray. I would but I cannot believe. I would but I cannot love. I would but I cannot repent.” Oh, hear this, Soul—“HE WILL PUT HIS STRENGTH IN YOU.” Go home. And down on your knees, if you cannot pray, groan. If you cannot groan, weep. If you cannot weep, feel. If you cannot feel, feel because you cannot feel. For that is as far as many get. But stop there—mark you, stop there—and He will give you His blessing.

Do not get up till you have got the blessing. Go there in all your weakness. If you do not feel it, say, “Lord, I do not feel as I ought to feel—but oh that I could! Lord, I cannot repent as I would repent—oh that You would help me!” “Oh, Sir,” you say, “but I could not go so far as that, for I don’t think I have got a strong desire.” Go and say, “Lord I would desire. Help me to desire.” And then sit down and think of your lost estate. Think of your ruin and the remedy and think on that. And mark you, while you are on the way, the Lord will meet with you. Only believe this, that if you try Christ He will never let you try in vain.

Go and risk your soul on Christ tonight, neck or nothing, Sinner. Go now, break or make. Go and say, “Lord, I know I must be damned if I have not Christ.” Stay there and say, “If I perish, I perish only here.” And I tell you, you will never perish. I am a bonds man for God. This head to the block if your soul goes to Hell if you pray sincerely and trust Christ. This neck to the gallows, again I say, this neck to the rope and to the hangman’s gallows, if Christ rejects you after you have earnestly sought Him. Only try that, I beseech you, poor Soul.

“Oh,” you say, “but I have not strength enough. I cannot do that.” Well, poor Soul, crawl to the mercy seat and there lie flat, just as your are. You know that misery often speaks when it utters not a word. The poor cripple squats himself down in the street. He says nothing. There protrudes a ragged knee and there is a wounded hand. He says nothing. But with his hands folded on his breast he looks at every passerby. And though not a word is spoken, he wins more than if he daily drawled out his tale, or sung it along the street.

So do you sit like Bartimaeus by the wayside begging. And if you hear Him pass by, then cry, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me.” But if you can scarce say that, sit there and exhibit your poor wounds. Tell the Lord your desperate condition. Strip your loathsome sores and let the Almighty see the venom. Turn out your heart and let the rank corruption be all inspected by the Almighty eye. “And He has mercies rich and free.” Who can tell poor Sinner, who can tell? He may look on you—

*“Jesus died upon the tree
And why, poor Sinner, not for you?
“His Sovereign grace is rich and free,
And why, poor Sinner, not for you?
“Our Jesus loved and saved me
Say why, poor Sinner, why not you?”*

Only do this and if you are a sinner, hear this—“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” He will not “Plead against you with His great power. No, He will put His strength in you!” The Lord dismiss you with His blessing!

